

THE RHODE ISLAND SHEEP COOPERATIVE NEWSLETTER

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MARCH 2006

A short note from the Editor...

Over the past three months, four members of the RI Sheep Cooperative have been meeting with representatives from the RI RC&D Area, RI DEM/ Div of Ag, and URI to work on a new and exciting project: Rhode Island grown wool blankets ("Rhody Warm"). A grant has been written, and plans are under way for the collection, processing and sale of Rhode Island wool blankets. This newsletter will contain information on this project, what kind of wool/fleeces we are looking for to make this project happen, how to care for your fleeces, and more. If you are interested in participating in the Rhody Warm project, please take the time read the specifics, fill out the sign up form and return it to us promptly. More specifics will be sent to those who sign up. As you read on, you will note this project calls for only quality fleeces. This is not the "old fashion" wool pool, or place to dump your junk fleeces! We want the best, so that our final product will be the best! We invite everyone to participate – any questions the contact person is: Barbara Thompson @ 401-949-0164 or mtompson5@cox.net.

The Rhode Island Cooperative provides its members with two newsletters a year, two potluck dinners-each featuring an educational program, a membership directory, support 4-H sheep activities, and promote lamb and wool at "The R.I. Sheep Co-op Shed" at the Foster Old Home Days in July. **Join today** – see back page for membership form.

"RHODY WARM" **WOOL BLANKET PROJECT**

Purpose: Develop a market based approach to improve markets and marketing of raw commercial grade wool, to bring more income to sheep farms from what is becoming a waste product.

Background: Rhode Island Sheep farms are having difficulty selling their wool. The decline of wool textile mills in New England and low wool prices have turned much raw wool into a nuisance rather than a product. The RI Resource Conversation & Development Area (RI RC&D) investigated options for these farmers for the local utilization of their raw material. Similar projects in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Oregon serve as examples of successful approaches to this issue. There are approximately 45-60 sheep farms registered with the RI DEM, Division of Agriculture and RI Sheep Cooperative. Many other smaller operations are believed to exist – in backyard farms and 4-H programs. An initial meeting was held in January to ascertain the level of interested in this project. Approximately twenty sheep farmers attended the meeting and were very enthusiastic about participating. A steering committee to move the project forward was formed and has had three meetings since. RC&D and the Division of Agriculture sees this as opportunity to create a beautiful wool blanket that can bring income to farmers while at the same time promoting the sustainability of local agriculture and agricultural products.

WOOL FOR BLANKETS

To produce a high quality product, we need to use high quality fleeces. This means no vegetable matter, no burdocks, no short wools, not wet wools, no belly wools, etc., no pieces of sisal or poly (bailing twine) or any foreign matter, and no marking paint contamination accepted. To obtain this, we should bed sheep on straw, do not carry hay over the sheep's back, use hay feeders that keep hay out of the wool as much as possible.

When shearing, you must keep your sheep dry. Withhold feed and water before shearing (so the animals' stomach will not be full when sheared). Have the sheep penned for shearing when the shearer arrives; he should not be expected to catch the sheep and shear them, too. The shearing area must be kept clean, we suggest you sweep after each sheep is sheared to dirt, manure, short wool, etc. Skirting the fleece after is very

important. You should remove belly wool, tags, urine soaked wool, felted wool, head and leg wool, kempy or hairy wool. Set up a skirting table to skirt each fleece after shearing; place the fleece skin side down and remove any wool with hay chaff, second cuts, etc. Have appropriate bags available – one for the discarded material and one for your good fleece. The best way to store wool is in paper leaf bags or card board boxes, plastic (trash) bags work well but do not tie the bag. Store the bagged or boxed fleeces in a clean, dry area. Wool stored on concrete or dirt floors will pick up moisture. Avoid hot areas, dust, moths and mice!

If you plan to participate in the Rhody Warm project, it is important to follow the above advice and to read the following:

Fleeces/wool must be brought to the collection point by the farmer on the designated day. An inspection committee will go over each skirted fleece individually. Only Rhode Island grown fleeces between 3 and 6 inches long, that are clean and dry, shorn within the last year and stored properly, and meet the approval of the inspectors will be accepted. Each fleece must be bagged/boxed separately so that each can be inspected individually and weighed. All discarded fleece and debris will be taken home by the farmer whose fleece it came from. White and Colored fleeces will be accepted. The Committee has the right to reject any wool. The Committee's decision is final. The farmer will receive \$0.40 per pound for their skirted fleece, checks to be mailed within one month from date of collection day. For those interested in getting a throw or blanket, credit will be given for the amount of wool they brought in. (see further articles in this newsletter).

If interested, fill out the information sheet and return as soon as possible. A definite date, time, and location of collection point will be announced at a later date (when all is finalized). Those signing up to participate will be advised as soon as possible.

This is for Rhode Island Sheep Cooperative members, so please pay your dues today!!

THE PROCESS: The skirted fleeces will be bagged and sent to

Faribault Mill in Minnesota for scouring and then sent onto Wheelock Textiles in Uxbridge, Massachusetts to be made into blankets. The final touch (the edging and napping) is done in West Warwick, Rhode Island. This all takes time, and the blankets should be ready by fall. A closer date will be made available when the wool gets to the mill in Uxbridge. All blankets will have the same pattern, and will be marked with a Rhody Warm label. A list of RI Sheep Cooperative members whose wool went into the making of the blankets will be distributed with each blanket. Each following year will host a different pattern- so each blanket is a collectors item!!

If you wish to reserve a throw to purchase and you bring 14 pounds of (accepted) skirted grease wool- you are entitled to purchase one (45x72) throw at cost; advanced payment is required on wool collection day for all reserved throws. The final cost is in the process of being determined, and will include shipping, processing, handling, and delivery charges. The farmer will be advised of the cost prior to collection day. The "collection day" is tentatively scheduled for Saturday June 24, 2006; place to be determined (this is in the works). You should call and book your shearer early!!!

*Want to learn more about skirting?
Spend the day at the Connecticut
Sheep, Wool & Fiber Festival –
classes are held almost all day long !!
(see flyer for details or go to website.)*

FEEDING SHEEP FOR A CLEAN WOOL CLIP **By Sue Johnson, Vermont**

I have been raising sheep for nearly 25 years. I keep approximately 35 sheep over the winter here in Northern Vermont. When I began with 4 sheep and knowing absolutely nothing about them, many colleagues thought it foolish for me to try and raise sheep with an emphasis on fleece. Experience has shown me over the years though, that keeping and marketing clean wool has made the difference between being in the red at the end of the year and making a sizable profit.

Looking back, in my first year of raising sheep, I found it difficult getting a few flakes of hay from where I stored it to the round 5 sided wooden feeder my husband had made me. The sheep were around me, pushing at my legs, trying to snatch morsels of hay as I walked to the feeder. Their first clip was full of pieces of hay and clover. The backs of the sheep were coated with this debris. I threw out a large section of the back wool and had to comb out lock by lock much of the side wool before I was able to spin it. I realized this sheep management wasn't going to help me fulfill my goal of selling nice fleece. I visited various sheep farms, large and small, each with unique housing situations, and asked lots of questions and looked for other options.

One large farm raising many sheep for their wool clip had large, long, v-shaped feeders, with plywood sides and slats at the bottom, with a tray to hold grain, set up so the shepherd could walk down the center of the feeders, adding hay or grain as needed. The fleece was clean on the animals with almost no chaff. Only later did I learn, after the sheep were sheared, that the chest areas and sides had become somewhat matted and felted together and much of the wool was unsuitable for selling to hand-spinners. The problem with this type of feeder, unless you have lots of barn and feeder space, is that the sheep, when they are shorn, take up a small amount of room next to their friends when they are eating. As their fleece grows, and in the case of many long-wool breeds, the sheep don't know how much "fatter" they are with their wool and they fit just as close side by side as they eat. The fleece is being rubbed back and forth as they go to eat together along a feeder that once served 8 sheep per side. With all their wool, it now only fits 3 or 4. In this farmer's situation, the feeders had worked adequately for a number of years when their flock size was smaller. As the numbers grew, and the barn was still large enough for the number of ewes, the number of feeders was not increased and the ewes packed in closer when they ate.

Many farmers feed on the ground outdoors. There are pros and cons to this management. If you have lots of "clean" pastureland (ground that is not

muddy or covered with manure), putting hay flakes on the ground spread out away from each other, allows a few sheep to eat at each flake. It is important to always put the hay in a different place every day to prevent the spread of parasites. Also, putting hay flakes along a fence row so the sheep only eat in a row also keeps chaff out. I have a friend that has a lot of large trees in her barnyard. While the sheep are in the barn or in a different field, she distributes individual flakes around the trees between the roots. For her flock of 35 ewes, she may spread 20 flakes or more around the trees before letting the ewes in to feed. Her resulting immaculate raw wool clip fetches a premium of \$8 to \$12 per pound and is in constant demand. Feeding on "clean" snow, following the same steps mentioned above also keeps most chaff out of wool. And the sheep will eat a lot of snow too which cuts down on your need to provide as much water. Some drawbacks to these methods, I have found, are that there will be some waste of feed. Some will inevitably get trampled underfoot. If you live in a windy area the hay can either blow away into the neighbor's fields or into the wool of the sheep that are eating. If the hay has a lot of clover or other legumes in it, some of the wasted feed will drop into the soil (or snow) as seed which, if you rotate where you feed, can help re-seed your fields. This can be an asset to some farmers; but a drawback if much of the little green chaff doesn't get eaten by the sheep, they are not getting all the nutrition you are counting on. Feeding on the ground inside your barn is never a good idea, as the floor will never be very sanitary and the feed can easily become contaminated.

Round feeders, either 5 or 6 sided with space for 10 or 12 sheep to eat, are my favorites. They take up a small amount of space for the number of sheep they serve and they are fairly easy to roll to another place. They have a closed-sided bottom that can double as a grain feeder; and the sheep, I find, like to eat from them. They come in metal versions and home made versions from USDA plans. My sheep are social, and they like to look at each other when they eat. With all their heads in the feeder together, they don't have to look

around to see who has a better bite of food, dropping hay as they chew on their neighbor like when they eat from the long v-shaped feeders. Three or four flakes of hay fit easily in the bottom, it stays clean and the sheep eat every bit of the second cut that I feed them so there is little or no waste. If I am worried about getting chaff in their wool, especially when a neighbor volunteers to feed the sheep if we go away, I show them how to put the flakes designated for a particular feeder in an old sheet. Then I catch it at the corners, and carry it across the barn, over the sheep's backs and put it into the feeder with the hay in it and then pull away the sheet carefully. Result: even inexperienced help can care for your sheep and not wreck your fleece and you can have a worry free vacation! When using these round feeders, I have found, from experience, that it is best to plan to have enough feeders so that the ratio of sheep to feeders is about six to one. I have had the ratio 10 to 1 but find that some sheep won't eat as much if they feel they have to fight for a space. Also, more feed seems to get wasted and more hay has a chance to get into the neck area if the hay is piled up too high in the feeder. The sheep always dig into the bottom of the pile of flakes to get the tasty crumbs.

If you have access to large round bales, putting four metal gates around a bale, so the sheep eat by putting their heads through the bars also is successful for keeping hay out of wool. You need to check that the gates are securely latched together and that they move in a parallelogram fashion as the sheep eat away the bale. There are special panels made for these large bales with slatted bars so the sheep can even eat along the ground, picking up what drops from the sides of the bale. It is important that the bale is placed in a well-drained spot to keep the area around the bale from getting muddy.

No matter how you feed out hay, it is a good idea to have the smaller sheep, for instance, lambs which are soon to become yearlings, an opportunity to be fed separate from the larger sheep. One reason for this is that a larger sheep, when it eats, will drop more hay on smaller sheep. Another reason is that the older sheep will eat the feed faster than the lambs

and the young animals will miss out on needed nutrition. One year, I made the mistake of feeding two ram lambs along with two large adult rams. When we sheared them in the spring, the older animals were very fat, and the lambs were walking skeletons. They had missed out on their share of the hay being slower eaters.

On another front, sheep love burdock! And burdock really ruins a wool clip. If your fields or barnyards have burdock in them, get rid of it. Cut and haul the plants away and with them as many of the burrs as you are willing to pick up off the ground. Once you have done this, the sheep will keep them mowed down to the ground and they will no longer be a problem, given that you check once in a while to see that the plants aren't desperately trying to go to seed with new tiny burdock flowers. If you have to buy your hay, check that it doesn't contain burdock. If it does, the sheep will fight for it and their cheeks will show it, wearing little round burdock ornaments. If you find your hay does have it, pull it out of the flakes before you feed it out, if possible, and tell your hay source you would rather not see it in the hay next year. It will be well worth the effort.

Presently, I use a combination of round feeders and feeding on the ground as weather and wind permits. I often decide on a daily basis what I do, though the feeders definitely save feed, especially during a wet, rainy period. I have a small barn and space is at a premium. I can roll the feeders inside or outside as weather conditions change. When I need to feed grain, it is easier to dump the grain over the heads of sheep into the feeders than to try and dump it along a trough with pushing and shoving sheep knocking me around. When the bottoms of the feeders get soiled or caked with residue, I scrape it out with a wide putty knife and onto the barn floor (I also periodically scrub them with a clorox solution). Many of my sheep stand with their heads in the feeder waiting for the feed to drop into it when they see me going to get the hay or grain.

Whatever your situation is, whether you have three sheep or 200, a little foresight and planning can go a long way to preserve your wool clip. It doesn't take much longer to feed in

such a manner to keep chaff out of the wool. A friend took a tour of a large yarn manufacturer in New England. While she was there, she asked why the mill uses wool primarily from other countries. The guide showed her bales of wool from the US and from New Zealand. Much of the US wool was yellow and uneven in color. He told her it didn't take the dyes as well due to its condition and what it took to get it clean, often yielding an inferior product. As more of us make an effort to have "clean clips," more wool markets I believe, will open up to us, whether to that mill, or to hand-spinners and felters or sweater and sock makers; bringing more income to our sheep operations. I encourage you to give it a try!

AGRICULTURAL REVIEW

*New England Agricultural Statistics –
Released March 3, 2006*

The following results from surveys completed via mail, telephone or personal interviews. For more information: www.nass.usda.gov or nass-nh@nass.usda.gov

Sheep and Goats: The New England Sheep and lamb inventory on July 1, 2006 totaled 47,000 head, an increase of 1,500 head from a year earlier. Breeding stock totaled 40,500 head at the first of the year, a 3% increase from 2005. Nationally sheep numbers increased 2% from the previous year. This is the first time that the US had two consecutive year to year increases since 1987 and 1988.

The New England goat and kids inventor on January 1, 2006 totaled 22,00 head, decreasing 600 head from the previous year. Milk goats totaled 11,400 head and continued to account for more than 50% of the New England goat total. Angora goats totaled 1,100 head, down 200 head from 2005. Meat and other goats totaled 9,500 head, a decrease of 500 head from the previous year. Nationally, Angora goats decreased 1%, whereas, both milk goats and meat and other goats increased, 1% and 5%, respectively.

Farm Numbers: The New England farm count for 2005 totaled 27,950 farms, a loss of 200 farms from a year earlier. New England land in farms, at 4.01 million acres in 2005, was unchanged from the 2004 farmland

area total. An estimated 100 farms were lost from agriculture in both Vermont and Maine from a year earlier, however acreage devoted to farmland remained unchanged. Maine accounted for the most land in farms in the region in 2005 with 1.37 million acres, followed by Vermont with 1.25 million acres. The average size of a farm in New England was 143 acres in 2005 ranging from 71 acres per farm in the high populated state of Rhode Island to 198 acres per farm in the dairy state of Vermont. New England Farm operations with less than \$10,000 in sales totaled 18,540 farms in 2005 or 66% of all farms operating, a decrease of 200 farms from a year earlier.

NEED A SHEARER ?

Bill Cournoyer, Connecticut (will travel) 860-887-3793 – prefers to be contacted by email @ bcour@portone.com.

Charlie Raymond, Connecticut (will travel) 860-889-6019

Courtney Caron, Woonsocket, RI 401-762-3695 (small flocks of sheep; also Llamas & Alpacas)

THINGS TO REMEMBER AT SHEARING SEASON:

*Call early to book your shearer, and follow up the week before to confirm date and time.

*Give the correct number of sheep to be sheared when you are scheduling your shearer.

*Be sure to tell the shearer which sheep are wethers and if a particular sheep has large scarring – this will avoid unnecessary cuts.

*Keep your sheep dry – on the day or two before the scheduled shearing day – a wet fleece is not a good product to try to sell.

*Have your sheep penned and ready for the shearer when he/she arrives.

*Take collars off the sheep before shearing.

*Remember this is hard work for the shearer – help as much as possible: bring the sheep to the “shearing mat”

and take the sheep off the “shearing mat” when the shearer is done, pick up & bag the fleece and sweep the mat off before bringing the next sheep. It is a good idea to have 2 or 3 people to help you with all these steps. The less “extra work” the shearer has to do – the more sheep he/she can shear for you.

*The shearer usually does not trim feet, deworm your sheep or give medicine—if you want him/her to do this, it is best to discuss ahead of time – do not assume they “do it all” because they usually don’t!

NEW ENGLAND SALE

Interested in the New England Sale held at the Big E fairgrounds in West Springfield, Massachusetts on July 14 and 15 2006? Do you have used sheep equipment in good/excellent condition that you want to sell, then consign to the Used Equipment Auction!

For more information go to www.nesheep.org.

THE NORTH EAST YOUTH SHEEP SHOW

WANTED: T-SHIRT SPONSORS -for \$25.00 you can help pay for the T-shirts we give to all youth exhibitors, and your name will appear with the list of donors on the back of the t-shirts. If you know a company or business who would like to make a donation, or if you would like to be a sponsor, contact Deb Hopkins, at 647-7281 or send your check to her at 1125 Danielson Pike, North Scituate, RI 02857 (please make checks payable to **NES&WG**).

WOOL GATHERING EVENT AT THE COGGESHALL FARM MUSEUM

Plans are being made for a *Wool Gathering Event* to coincide with the arrival of sheep shearing day (Sunday) at the Coggeshall Farm Museum located in Bristol, Rhode Island. The event is held on the grounds at the 18th Century Marsh Farm, and is open to the public from 10-4 on Saturday and Sunday, May 13th & 14th, 2006. Interpreters will be at the farm house with period specific crafters, and

contemporary crafters will be within the barnyard area. The Museum is looking for vendors with wool and/or fiber related products, such as but not limited to wool, fiber, felting, yarn, wheels, etc. Linda Rhynard, Pres/Treas of the Board of Directors says, “we are connected with several spinning groups in this area and we thought that it would be a great way to link the groups, as well as an opportunity to educate the broader community on contemporary spinning”. Linda & Rick Larson are Farm Managers with experience in museums and farming. *So, if this sounds like fun to you, pack a lunch and spend the day at the Coggeshall Farm Museum on May 13 or 14th*. If you would like to be a vendor, contact either Linda or Rick @ 401-253-5373 (the Farm) or Linda Rhynard @ 401-258-7577 (cell).

SOME ASI NEWS....

Moxidectin Approved for Sheep

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is amending the animal drug regulations to reflect approval of a new animal drug application (NADA) filed by Fort Dodge Animal Health, Division of Wyeth. The NADA provides for oral use of moxidectin solution in sheep for the treatment and control of a variety of internal parasites.

Under the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, this approval qualifies for seven years of exclusive marketing rights beginning Nov. 30, 2005, because this drug has been declared a designated new animal drug by FDA. The new drug was also approved for use as of this date.

One limitation on the use of this drug is that sheep must not be slaughtered for human consumption within seven days of treatment.

This is good news, says Jim Logan, DVM, chairman of the American Sheep Industry Associations (ASI) Health Committee. “ASI has listed new anthelmintics for sheep as one of the top priorities for our industry when meeting with FDA/Center for Veterinary Medicine.”

Logan also cautions that inappropriate and overuse of anthelmintics has been demonstrated to render otherwise good de-wormers

ineffective; he urges producers to "make sure they follow the label and confirm you have a problem before you treat.

USDA Considering New Animal ID Approach

The Agriculture Department is considering a new approach for a national animal identification system that would allow the department to link to a network of private and state-operated animal tracking databases, John Clifford, DVM, U.S. Department of Agriculture's chief veterinarian, said at an American Farm Bureau Federation annual meeting conference.

The system would allow USDA to tap into a portal of various animal identification and tracking systems run by commodity groups or other organizations, as well as into 20 existing state databases. The new approach retains the critical components of a national database already established by USDA: premises registration, animal identification (individual or by groups/lots) and animal tracking. "The concept will allow us to enter into agreements with the different entities responsible for the different databases," Clifford explained. The agreement will define the legal responsibility of all parties involved regarding the system's specifications, which USDA has determined will be reliable, uninterrupted access for state health officials and no user fees for states or federal entities accessing the system. "It will also define the necessary safeguards to preserve the data if the organization or company ceases to maintain that database," he continued. Clifford emphasized that the agency is now only considering the feasibility of this approach, but said Secretary Mike Johanns strongly supports the idea. While the stakeholders involved in the animal identification debate are a diverse lot, the cost of developing, implementing and maintaining a system is a concern shared by all. *Reprinted in part from CattleNetwork.com*

Leadership School Deadline Nears

Applications to the National Lamb Feeders Association (NLFA) Leader-

ship School must be submitted by May 1, 2006. This year's school will be held in Greeley, Colo., from July 9-12.

The 2006 school will be under the direction of Steve LeValley, Ph.D., Colorado State University sheep specialist. Students, who may be sheep producers, lamb feeders or anyone involved with the sheep industry, will participate in facility tours and farm visits throughout the Greeley area.

Attendance is limited to 25 students. Attendees must be 20 years of age or older and are responsible for their own travel to the location. There is no fee to apply, however, once accepted, a registration fee of \$100 is required to secure placement. NLFA, with the support of the National Sheep Industry Improvement Center, covers the cost of meals, lodging and tour-related expenses.

Applications may be downloaded from the NLFA Web site at www.nlfa-sheep.org or requested by calling (503) 370-7024.

RI 4-H NEWS

The Roger Williams Park Zoo is renovating its farmyard and has invited 4-H members and clubs to be actively involved in teaching the public about farming. The new farmyard will feature some of the same animals as before and some new ones. Several rare breeds of livestock will be represented, such as Dexter cattle, Santa Cruz sheep, San Clement goats, Guinea Hogs, European rabbits, Sicilian donkeys and RI Red chickens. Zoo educators are looking for very special young people to demonstrate skills like spinning wool, making butter, along with teaching the public about rare breeds and their importance, and other topics relating to agriculture and the environment. A meeting has been scheduled with Zoo staff and 4-H clubs to get this project rolling !

URI LAUNCHES SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE TECHNICAL SUPPORT PROJECT

The RI Sustainable Agriculture Technical Support Project is a new agricultural service initiative of the

University of Rhode Island, College of the Environment and Life Sciences, Cooperative Extension. The project will provide commercial farmers and growers with research-based agricultural information, problem solving recommendations, and on-farm consulting services in such areas as crop production, sustainable agricultural practices and farm diversification enterprises, marketing, and other aspects of farm development and management. The free services are offered to all RI farms and will undertake special outreach efforts to farms where technical assistance is needed most and where there is greatest potential to enhance farm viability – Rhode Island's small-scale food, fiber and specialty crop producers.

The two year URI project was developed in consultation with the RI Division of Agriculture and the RI Center for Agricultural Promotion and Education, and is funded by a grant from the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program and the URI Cooperative Extension. The goal of this project is to establish an information and technical support system for commercial agriculture in which farmers and growers can readily access the agricultural information they need to make informed decisions and connect with URI on specific production questions or to arrange for field consultations including whole-farm assessments. Over its two year term, the project will also collect data on the level and type of agricultural information and technical support services needed in RI, and will test a variety of information and program delivery methods.

Whitney O'Hanian, a newly hired Cooperative Extension Sustainable Agriculture Specialist in the Department of Plant Sciences and Entomology, is the primary contact for the project. Whitney is in the process of introducing the new service to the RI agricultural community and invites farmers and growers to contact her. Whitney is also available to speak to agricultural groups and service providers about the project. Whitney O'Hanian can be reached at, wohanian@uri.edu or at the URI Plant Protection Clinic (401) 874-2967

Wool Management
Maximizing Wool Returns
Don Van Nostran, of
Mid-States Wool Growers

With the increase in wool demand, the development of new markets, and the government LDP program, the producer has been provided an opportunity to make the wool a profit center in their sheep enterprise. In order for the producer to maximize this opportunity, the producer needs to prepare for their wool crop throughout the year. This means proper management.

Management to many producers involves having the sheep dry and penned up when the shearer arrives. This is only the minimum level of management required to harvest their wool crop. Unfortunately, there are even some producers that can't reach this threshold. The sheep are not penned up and many times they are wet when the shearer arrives. This is not preparing to maximize your wool return.

Another form of management is on the other extreme. These producers plan daily to maximize their wool return. They shear their sheep and then place a cover over the animal to be worn for the next 12 months. They clip their pastures to prevent the covers from getting torn and thus contaminate their fleeces. They keep their feed at the sheep's feet in order to reduce feed contamination in the wool. Finally, the day of shearing is busy with activity. The sheep are penned; the shearing floor is clean and kept that way during the entire shearing process by sweeping the floor between sheep. The fleeces are placed on a skirting table and anything that is not 100% acceptable is pulled from the main fleece and bagged separately. The fleeces are stored in a clean, dry place until it is marketed. Marketing is planned by taking the fleeces to shows and fairs where spinners and producers can meet face to face.

The difference between these two management approaches can mean as much as 10 to 100 times more return for the second approach compared to the first. The sheep can be the same, but the management is the difference. Many times we hear producers say that they don't manage their wool

because it isn't worth anything. Most producers can increase their wool check 100% if they would just get their wool out of the defect grade and into the clear wool grade.

Defect wool may be due to high vegetable matter content. This can be corrected by not feeding over the top of the sheep's back and neck or by mowing pasture fields to control burrs. Defect wool may be due to fiber strength. This is caused by stress sometime during the growth of the wool fiber. This may be poor nutrition, excessive worms creating an anemic situation, or fever at lambing. Defect wool may be due to short fiber length, off-color fibers or kempy fleeces. All of these defect wools can be corrected through management. Mother Nature will grow a strong, clean, usable wool fiber if the sheep are properly managed.

While most producers are not at either end of the above description of management practices, most of us are somewhere in the middle. Many times there are management practices that do not require a lot of extra effort if we would just think about our goal of a good fleece throughout the year.

Following a few key management practices, producers can realize more return from their wool clip.

- ❖ Staple length can be affected by shearing once a year at 12-month intervals. This will provide a three inch staple which is used by the largest number of mills
- ❖ The nutritional level of the sheep throughout the year affects staple strength. Placing sheep under stress due to reduced feed intake or excessive worms can cause a weak spot or general weakness in the fiber strength. Keep your ewes in a body condition of 2.5-3.5 throughout the year.
- ❖ Staple strength is affected by physical stress on the sheep. One of the most critical times in the ewe's life is lambing. A fever at lambing can place a break in the fiber, which causes the wool fiber to break at a specific point along its length. This break means that there are two pieces of fiber on each side of the break of which neither one of the lengths is 3 inches. Solution, shear the sheep prior to lambing. If a break occurs it is at the end of the fiber and creates no problem to fiber

length.

- ❖ Excessive vegetable contamination of the fleece. This is caused in one of two ways. First is in the pasture. If pastures have weeds, cockle burr, seed heads, this will cling to the fleece and lower its value. Secondly, the VM is coming from the barn feeding system. Are your feeders allowing the sheep to stick their heads into the hay and contaminate the fleece with hay chaff along their neck and back? Clipping pastures or shearing before the ewes come to the barn for winter-feeding will reduce the amount of hay chaff and contamination to the fleece.
 - ❖ At shearing, management needs to occur before the shearer gets to the farm. First, don't bed the barn the night before shearing is to take place. This straw will cling to the wool and ruin an otherwise useful clip. Clean straw in the wool is a dead giveaway to poor management.
 - ❖ Shear dry sheep. Under no circumstances should wet sheep be shorn. The wool will be ruined and can't be saved. Even a little damp will allow wool to turn yellow, stain and mildew.
 - ❖ Keep the shearing floor clean. Sweep up tags and bellies and bag them separately. Sticking them in the middle of the fleece to try and hide them lowers the value of the entire clip and contaminates the clear wool, which should have greater value. A wool buyer is not stupid. They know that all sheep have belly wool and tags. Bagging it separately and marketing it for what it is allows the buyer to pay you the maximum value of your entire clip.
 - ❖ Bag wool one fleece at a time so it can be graded. The preferred packaging material is clear plastic wool bags. This eliminates the burlap contamination common in the old burlap wool bags. Never bag wool in plastic feed sacks. This contaminates wool with polypropylene and this can not be separated completely at grading which will ruin a total piece of the final fabric.
- These points, while basic will do more to improve the quality of a clip than anything else a producer can do. For further improvement, a producer would need to look at the genetic

makeup of their sheep and determine if it is in their best interest to try and lower the fiber diameter.

2006 CALENDAR

April 29 – Connecticut Sheep, Wool & Fiber Festival, Tolland, CT.; for info: www.ctsheep.org

May 6 & 7 – Annual Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival, Howard County Fairgrounds, West Friendship, Maryland; admission and parking free! For information: www.sheepandwool.org.

May 13 & 14 – Annual New Hampshire Sheep & Wool Festival, Hopkinton State Fairgrounds, Contoocook, NH (Exit 7 off I 89, enter blue gate on Park Avenue/Route 103). For info: www.yankeeshpherd.com.

May 13 & 14 – Wool Gathering Event, Coggeshall Farm, Bristol, RI. For information: Linda Larson, Farm Manager 401-253-9062.

May 20th - The Empire Spring Classic Purebred Sheep Sale (show & sale same day), Cobleskill Sunshine Fairgrounds, Cobleskill, New York. For information contact: Jim & Lois Goblet at 518-295-7188 or go to: www.empirespringclassic.org.

(Empire Classic Youth Sheep Show on Saturday night and Sunday)

May 27 & 28 - Annual Massachusetts Sheep & Woolcraft Fair, @ Cummington Fairgrounds, Cummington, Massachusetts. For info: www.MASHEEPWOOL.org

July 7-9th - Southern Rhode Island 4-H Fair, held at the Washington County Fairgrounds, Richmond, RI

July 15-16th - Eastern RI 4-H Country Fair held at Glen Farm, Portsmouth, RI

July 14 - 16 – 22nd Annual North East Youth Sheep Show held at Eastern States Exposition Fairgrounds, W. Springfield, MA. For information contact: Polly Hopkins, @ 401-949-4619 or email: khop4811@aol.com or go to www.nesheep.org

July 14-15th – 64th Annual New England Sheep Sale & Annual Used Equipment Auction, held at the Big E Fairgrounds, West Springfield, Massachusetts. For information: www.nesheep.org or contact Becky Peterson, Sale Manager, at 413-624-5562; or email at: orvalbc@shaysnet.com

July 28-30th - Foster Old Home Days, Foster, Rhode Island (4-H sheep show on Saturday afternoon.

Aug 16 – 20th - Washington County Fair, in Richmond, Rhode

September 15 - October 1st - Eastern States Exposition, West Springfield, MA (open sheep shows held all during the fair: with “meat breeds” the first week, “wool breeds” the second week, and the 4-H sheep show last weekend of the fair).

October 21st - New York Bred Ewe Sale @ Dutchess County Fairgrounds, Rhinebeck, New York. For information go to:

www.bannersheepmanagement.com

October 20-22nd - New York Sheep & Wool Festival, and Regional Border Leicester Show, @ Dutchess County Fairgrounds, Rhinebeck, New York. For info go to: www.sheepandwool.com

RHODY WARM WOOL BLANKET PROJECT

I have read all the information in the newsletter about the project and _____ YES, I want to be involved!

NAME: _____

FARM: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TEL #: _____

EMAIL: _____

APPROXIMATE POUNDAGE OF SKIRTED WOOL, 3-6 INCHES IN LENGTH:

I understand more information will be sent to me when plans are finalized.

****Must be a RI Sheep Coop member, so join today !!***

Sent to: Polly Hopkins
494 Evans Road
Chepachet, RI 02814

RHODE ISLAND SHEEP CO-OPERATIVE

MEMBERSHIP FORM:

_____ I am enclosing my check in the for \$10.00 for my 2006 dues

NAME: _____

FARM NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

**BREED(S)
OF SHEEP:** _____

**ARTICLES FOR SALE / SERVICES
OFFERED:**

Make check payable:

R.I. Sheep Co-operative

Mail to:

RI Sheep Cooperative
c/o Polly Hopkins
494 Evans Road
Chepachet, RI 02814